



Tourism, Sustainability, and Environmental Conservation: A Case Study of Cerro De La Memoria in Los Mochis, Sinaloa

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism and environmental conservation represent priority challenges in the management of tourist attractions, particularly in the context of increasing tourism activity and the growing pressure on natural resources. This study aims to analyze the sustainability and environmental conservation strategies implemented at Cerro de la Memoria, located in the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa, which is considered an urban tourist attraction of environmental, cultural, and social relevance. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach through a case study that included visitor surveys and semi-structured interviews with institutional stakeholders involved in site management. The results indicate that Cerro de la Memoria is primarily used by local and regional tourism, with a predominance of sports, cultural, and religious activities. In addition, institutional actions aimed at protecting the natural environment were identified, including area cleaning, infrastructure maintenance, environmental monitoring, and reforestation programs. The findings highlight the need to strengthen environmental education and awareness strategies targeting both visitors and the local community, as well as to consolidate interinstitutional coordination to ensure site conservation. It is concluded that the integration of public policies, environmental regulations, social participation, and responsible tourism practices is essential to balance the tourism use of Cerro de la Memoria with its preservation as an urban natural space, thereby contributing to long-term sustainable tourism development.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, sustainability and environmental conservation have become fundamental elements in the management of tourist attractions, particularly in light of the sustained growth of local, regional, national, and international tourism, which places increasing pressure on natural and cultural resources. This phenomenon poses significant challenges for tourist destinations while simultaneously demanding responsible strategies that balance economic development with environmental protection.

According to the World Tourism Organization (ONU Turismo, 2024), international tourist arrivals reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels during the first quarter of 2024, representing approximately 285 million international trips. This growth positions tourism as a driver of economic and social development; however, it also generates significant environmental impacts if not properly managed. In this context, tourism at all scales must actively contribute to

environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources.

In Mexico, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT, 2017) highlights that nature-based tourism generates economic benefits while simultaneously promoting ecosystem conservation, environmental care, and improvements in quality of life. This approach is based on the understanding of tourism as a complex social phenomenon. According to Schwink (1929) and Bormann (1930), cited by Fuentes Moreno (2015), tourism involves the temporary movement of people outside their usual place of residence for leisure, health, religious, work, or recreational purposes, which entails direct interaction with natural and cultural environments.

Recent figures reinforce the relevance of tourism in Mexico. The Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, 2024) reported the arrival of 29 million international tourists in 2024, representing a 5.5% increase compared to 2023. At the state

level, the Congress of the State of Sinaloa (CES, 2025) reported a record economic impact of 38 billion pesos and the arrival of 5.5 million tourists during the same period. Likewise, the Government of the State of Sinaloa (GES, 2024) indicated that the state's three international airports registered nearly three million passengers, with Los Mochis accounting for more than 450,000 travelers.

In response to this scenario, UN Tourism (2023) emphasizes that tourism must be planned and managed responsibly in order to generate employment, promote social inclusion, protect natural and cultural heritage, conserve biodiversity, and improve the well-being of host communities. This approach aligns with the concept of sustainability, understood as an integrative framework that considers economic, social, and environmental dimensions and recognizes human beings as an integral part of the biosphere (Zarta Ávila, 2018).

Several authors agree that tourism sustainability requires addressing negative impacts such as waste generation, intensive use of energy and water, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation (Vilchis-Chávez et al. (2023); Barbulho Maia et al. (2023). Thus, sustainability not only seeks to mitigate these impacts but also to promote environmental conservation practices that ensure the preservation of tourist destinations for present and future generations.

At the local level, Cerro de la Memoria, located in the city of Los Mochis, municipality of Ahome, Sinaloa, is recognized as a significant urban tourist attraction (Sinaloa, 2025). However, previous studies indicate that environmental perception of the area is unfavorable for adequate conservation, highlighting the need for interventions aimed at sustainable management, protection of flora and fauna, and environmental awareness among visitors and stakeholders (Quintero Romanillo, 2023).

Los Mochis is characterized by strategic connectivity and tourism potential, supported by air, rail, maritime, and land infrastructure, which increases visitor flows and, consequently, pressure on its natural attractions (Gatica Moreno, 2020). This context underscores the importance of analyzing sustainability and environmental conservation strategies applied in urban tourist spaces such as Cerro de la Memoria.

The objective of this research is to analyze sustainability and environmental conservation strategies implemented at Cerro de la Memoria in Los Mochis, Sinaloa, as a tourist attraction, using a qualitative approach. To this end, surveys were administered to visitors and semi-structured interviews were conducted with institutional stakeholders in order to examine environmental management practices, environmental care, and preservation of the site as both a tourist and natural space.

Tourism, Destinations, and Tourist Attractions

Tourist destinations play a key role in implementing sustainable practices aimed at ecosystem conservation and

local development. The International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (RIET, 2010) define the main destination of a tourist trip as the place central to the travel decision, highlighting the importance of tourist attractions as core components of tourism products.

Acerenza (1984), cited in Navarro (2015), notes that tourist attractions constitute the most important component of tourism products, as they determine destination choice and generate tourist flows. These attractions satisfy primary travel motivations and therefore require proper management to ensure conservation and sustainable use.

Tourism, as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon, involves the temporary movement of people outside their usual environment for personal, professional, or recreational reasons (RIET, 2010). Within this framework, various forms of tourism are recognized, including national and international tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, health tourism, sports tourism, mountain tourism, and religious tourism, each generating differentiated impacts on natural and sociocultural environments.

The conservation-oriented tourism approach emphasizes protecting natural, cultural, and landscape resources, recognizing tourism as a potential tool for environmental preservation when responsibly managed (Suárez Barros, 2024). Furthermore, promoting environmental education among visitors, local communities, and institutional actors is highlighted as a strategy for strengthening conservation awareness in tourist destinations.

Sustainability and Environmental Conservation

Sustainability and environmental conservation constitute central axes in contemporary analyses of tourism development, as they consider the interaction among social, economic, and environmental systems. From this perspective, sustainability is grounded in a systemic approach that recognizes the interdependence between human well-being and ecosystem integrity, promoting balance among ecological, social, and economic dimensions (Coronel Arias, 2021).

At the international level, the United Nations, through the World Tourism Organization, defines sustainable tourism as tourism that fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts in order to meet the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities (UN, 2017). This definition emphasizes the responsibility of the tourism sector to protect natural and cultural resources and to improve local quality of life.

Sustainable tourism generates significant economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits when based on principles that integrate these dimensions in a balanced manner (ONU Turismo, 2009). Accordingly, sustainable tourism should: (a) optimize the use of environmental resources, maintaining essential ecological processes and biodiversity; (b) respect the sociocultural authenticity of host

communities, preserving tangible and intangible heritage; and (c) ensure long-term viable economic activities that provide equitable benefits and contribute to poverty reduction.

The concept of sustainable development was consolidated through the Brundtland Report, which defines it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 2020). This definition reinforces the need to integrate economic growth with environmental protection and social equity, particularly in activities such as tourism, which depend directly on natural and cultural resources.

In the Mexican context, the General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection (LGEEPA, 2024) defines sustainable development as a process aimed at improving quality of life and productivity through the evaluation of environmental, economic, and social criteria and indicators, based on preserving ecological balance and protecting the environment and natural resources. This regulatory framework is essential for guiding sustainable tourism management policies and strategies.

Chávez Dagostino et al. (2013) argue that sustainable tourism should be understood as a dynamic paradigm that incorporates multiple approaches and perceptions, considering the complexity of tourism systems and their relationship with the environment. From this perspective, tourism sustainability implies the harmonious integration of tourism activity with the natural and sociocultural environments of destinations.

Regulatory Framework and Environmental Management in Tourism

Environmental management in tourism is supported by regulatory frameworks that guide ecosystem protection and sustainable practices. In Mexico, (SEMARNAT, 2021) plays a fundamental role through the issuance of Official Mexican Standards (NOMs), which establish criteria, characteristics, and procedures for environmental protection and conservation of ecosystems and natural resources.

These standards address areas such as water, environmental impact, waste management, flora and fauna protection, emissions, soils, and measurement methodologies, enabling the incorporation of sustainability indicators into tourism activities and ensuring development under conservation principles (SEMARNAT, 2021).

At the local level, the Municipal Planning Institute of Ahome (IMPLAN, 2014) proposes environmental policy strategies aimed at efficient management of green areas, environmental urban image, and ecological land-use planning, including the declaration of Cerro de la Memoria as a locally protected natural area. These actions strengthen ecological conservation, interinstitutional participation, and sustainable territorial planning.

Cerro de la Memoria as a Tourist Attraction

Cerro de la Memoria is a historical, cultural, and natural icon of the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa. Its symbolic, scenic, and

recreational value positions it as one of the region's most important urban tourist attractions (Gatica Moreno, 2020). This space hosts diverse tourism activities, including health, sports, religious, and ecotourism, all of which involve constant interaction between visitors and the natural environment.

The biological richness of Cerro de la Memoria, represented by its flora and fauna, along with its cultural and religious significance, demands environmental conservation strategies that ensure preservation amid tourism pressure. Sustainable management of this attraction is essential for promoting responsible use, fostering environmental education, and guaranteeing conservation of both ecosystem and cultural heritage for future generations.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, which allows for a comprehensive understanding of social and environmental phenomena from the perspectives of the actors involved and within the context in which they occur. According to Vera (2015, as cited in Salazar-Escorcía, 2020), qualitative research focuses on the study of the quality of activities, relationships, and processes in a given situation, seeking a holistic and detailed description that enables an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under study.

The methodological design adopted corresponds to a case study focused on Cerro de la Memoria, located in the city of Los Mochis, in the municipality of Ahome, Sinaloa. This site was selected due to its relevance as an urban tourist attraction with significant environmental, social, and cultural value. This approach made it possible to analyze the sustainability and environmental conservation strategies implemented at the site, as well as visitors' perceptions and the institutional management related to its preservation.

The research was carried out in two complementary stages. In the first stage, a survey was administered as a data collection instrument to visitors of Cerro de la Memoria. The purpose of the survey was to identify the predominant type of tourism, visitors' motivations, perceptions regarding the conditions of the area, potential improvements to the site, and the level of environmental conservation. The collected data were processed using Microsoft Excel software, version 2023, through descriptive analysis, which allowed for the organization and systematization of the information obtained.

In the second stage, an analysis of the sustainability and environmental conservation strategies implemented by the municipal entities involved in the management of Cerro de la Memoria was conducted. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants from the Municipal Tourism Department, the Public Works Department, and the Environmental and Urban Development Department of the municipality of Ahome. The interviews focused on aspects related to the regulatory framework of the protected area from an environmental sustainability

perspective, the allocation of institutional roles, the evaluation of strategies implemented for environmental protection, the priority given to the preservation of Cerro de la Memoria as a tourist attraction, and awareness-raising efforts aimed at conserving the site.

The information obtained from the surveys and interviews was analyzed integrally, allowing for data triangulation between visitors’ perceptions and institutional management practices. This process strengthened the validity of the study and enabled a broader understanding of the sustainability and environmental conservation practices

applied at Cerro de la Memoria, in relation to its tourist use and its preservation as a natural space.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the application of the survey instrument and the analysis of the collected information make it possible to identify the main patterns of tourism use, environmental perception, and conservation strategies related to Cerro de la Memoria in the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa.

First, the type of tourism visiting Cerro de la Memoria was identified, as shown in figure 1.

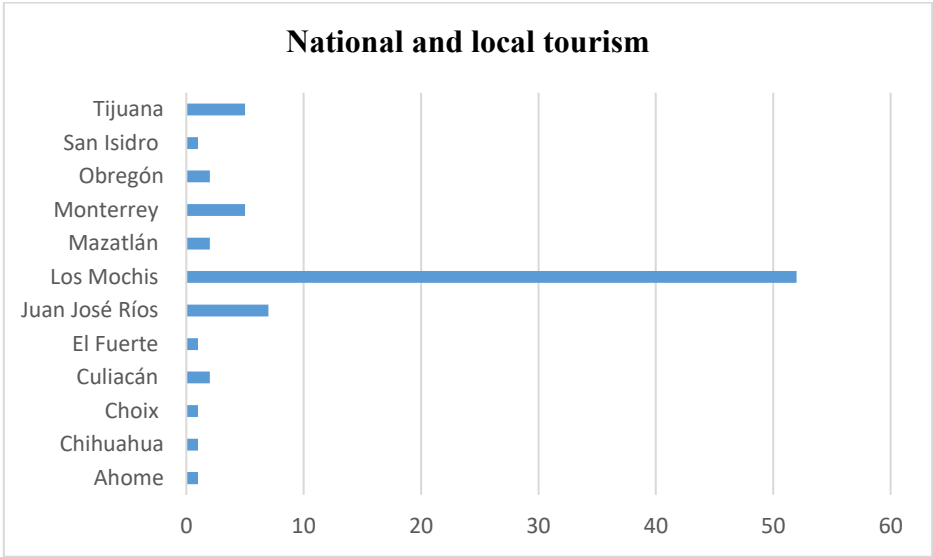


Figure 1: National and local tourism.

Local tourism predominates, accounting for 48% of visitors, corresponding to residents of the city of Los Mochis. In addition, the presence of regional tourism is observed, indicating that the site not only serves a local recreational function but also attracts visitors from neighboring municipalities. This finding is consistent with EUROINNOVA (2024), which highlights that local tourism is oriented toward the exploration and enjoyment of

attractions within one’s own region, strengthening territorial identity and the social use of tourism spaces.

Regarding the survey results, visitors to Cerro de la Memoria identified their main motivations for visiting as follows: hiking ranked first with 26.2%, followed by La Pérgola with 25%, and the Virgen Reina del Valle del Fuerte in third place with 21.3% (see Figure 2). As noted by the United Nations (2010), these motivations reflect the predominance of sports, cultural, and religious tourism at Cerro de la Memoria.

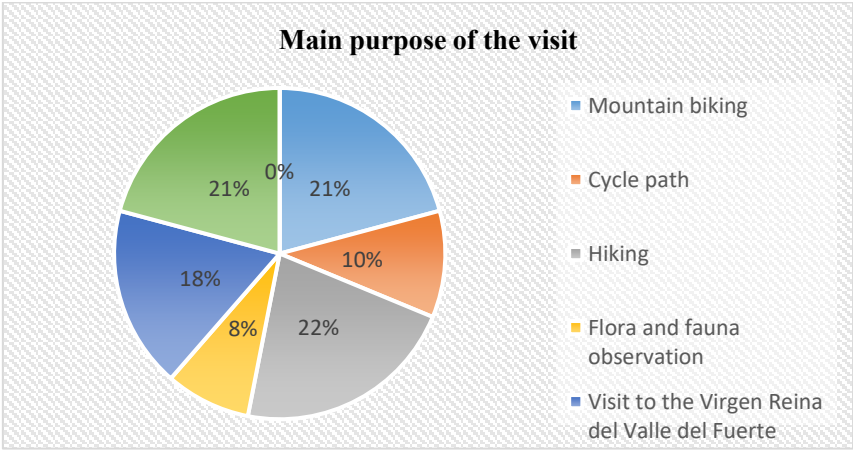


Figure 2: Main purpose of the visit.

According to the survey instrument, visitors identified cleaning activities as the most important strategy, accounting

for 32%, followed by cultural events with 20%, and security measures in third place with 14% (see Figure 3).

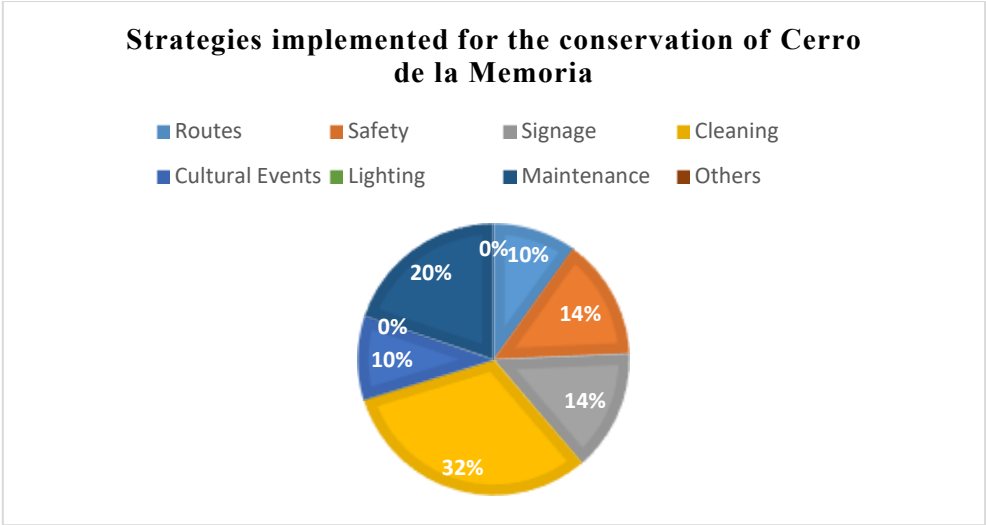


Figure 3: Strategies implemented for the conservation of Cerro de la Memoria.

From the perspective of environmental protection, the Municipal Government has implemented various strategies aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of plans, programs, and projects. These initiatives include monitoring and surveillance actions focused on ecology, sustainable development, biodiversity, flora and fauna, soil conditions, and environmental impact, all of which contribute to the protection of the natural and cultural environment and to community well-being. According to guided tour activities, the House of Culture has adequately trained personnel to receive visitors and provide

guided tours. Likewise, tourist attractions such as La Pérgola, the viewpoint, and visits to the Virgen María Reina del Valle, among others, are accessible through travel agencies that offer tour guide services. This indicates that the Municipal Tourism Department can arrange guided tours, with departmental staff available to deliver the expected visitor experience. Regarding the activities carried out at Cerro de la Memoria, visits to La Pérgola ranked first with 25%, followed by visits to the Virgen del Valle with 22.5%, and hiking in third place with 21.2% (see Figure 4).

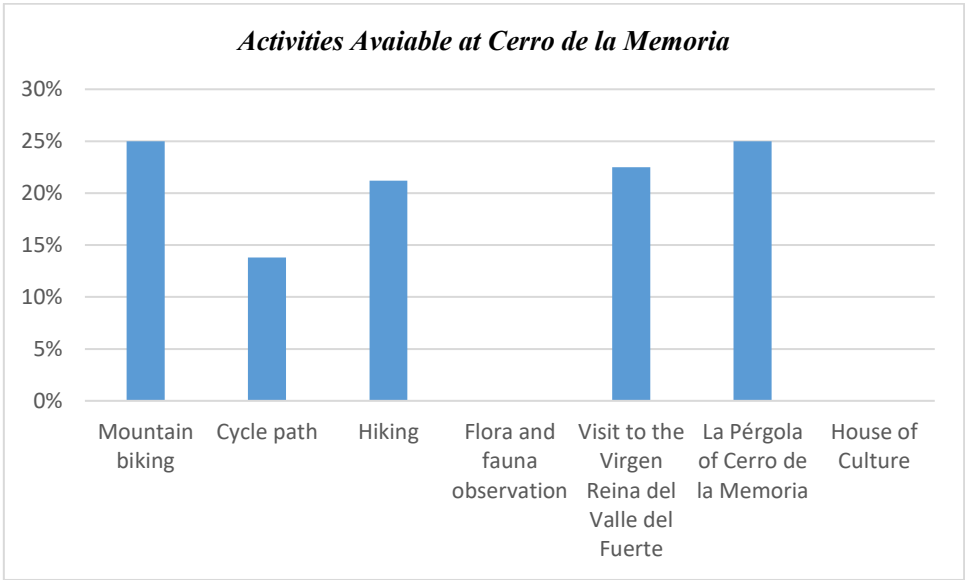


Figure 4: Activities Available at Cerro de la Memoria.

Finally, the results show that Cerro de la Memoria constitutes an emblematic tourist attraction for the city of Los Mochis and a key element in the promotion of the destination.

However, the findings also underscore the need to strengthen environmental care and preservation actions through continuous maintenance strategies, such as the renewal of

waste containers, the cleaning of less frequently used trails such as the cycle path, landscape enhancement, and the implementation of reforestation campaigns. These actions are essential to ensure the conservation of the site and its sustainable tourism use in the long term.

DISCUSSION

Cerro de la Memoria has become one of the most representative urban tourist attractions in the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa, and plays a strategic role in the context of sustainability and environmental conservation. The results of the study show that this site not only fulfills recreational and cultural functions but also faces the challenge of reconciling the growth of tourism activity with the preservation of its biodiversity, ecosystem, and natural resources. In this regard, appropriate site management is essential to ensure sustainable tourism development that minimizes environmental impacts and enhances the well-being of the local community.

From a territorial planning perspective, the policies and strategies established by the Municipal Planning Institute of Ahome (IMPLAN, 2014) constitute a relevant framework for the management of Cerro de la Memoria. These strategies, based on land-use zoning and the regulation of land use and development, seek to integrate natural conservation areas, green spaces, and urban infrastructure, which is consistent with the principles of environmental sustainability. However, the results suggest that the effectiveness of these instruments largely depends on their consistent implementation, interinstitutional coordination, and the incorporation of environmental criteria into the daily management of tourism activities at the site.

Likewise, the involvement of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT, 2021), through the implementation of Official Mexican Standards (NOMs), represents a key component in the protection of the natural environment of Cerro de la Memoria. Standards related to the protection of flora and fauna, soil conservation, and environmental impact assessment establish technical guidelines that contribute to ecosystem preservation. Nevertheless, the discussion of the results indicates that the existence of a regulatory framework alone does not guarantee destination sustainability; rather, it requires supervision, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective compliance.

In line with the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (RIET, 2010), tourism sustainability at Cerro de la Memoria is closely linked to the active participation of the local community and visitors. The results show that tourists value basic conservation actions, such as cleanliness and site maintenance, suggesting an opportunity to strengthen environmental education and awareness programs targeting both visitors and residents. These strategies can foster greater shared responsibility for

environmental care and help consolidate more responsible tourism practices.

In this context, initiatives such as the native flora reforestation program “Transformation of the Immediate Environment and Its Urban Resilience,” promoted by the Municipal Government of Ahome (2022) in coordination with educational institutions and municipal agencies, represent significant progress toward the environmental conservation of Cerro de la Memoria. Such actions not only contribute to ecosystem restoration but also strengthen the linkage between public management, academia, and society, which is consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

Finally, the diversity of tourism modalities present at Cerro de la Memoria including mountain tourism, ecotourism, cultural, religious, and health tourism offers significant potential to promote a sustainable tourism model that contributes to both environmental awareness and local economic development. However, for these modalities to develop sustainably, it is essential to ensure that tourism activities do not exceed the ecosystem’s carrying capacity and that management strategies are implemented to balance site enjoyment with long-term conservation. In this sense, the articulation of public policies, environmental regulations, social participation, and environmental education emerges as a key element in ensuring the sustainability of Cerro de la Memoria as a tourist attraction.

CONCLUSIONS

Cerro de la Memoria, as a touristic and scenic icon of the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa, plays a relevant role in local tourism dynamics and socio-economic development. The results of this study confirm that this attraction not only contributes to economic activity and the cultural identity of the region but also represents a strategic space for the implementation of sustainability-oriented practices and environmental conservation, which are increasingly prioritized in the management of urban tourist destinations.

The objective of this research focused on analyzing the sustainable tourism and environmental conservation strategies applied at Cerro de la Memoria. Based on the analysis of institutional management and the actions implemented, it was identified that local authorities, in coordination with various municipal departments and the Municipal Planning Institute of Ahome (IMPLAN), have developed initiatives aimed at protecting the natural environment. These actions include the regulation of land use, solid waste management, maintenance of public lighting, environmental signage, and the enforcement of the Urban Image and Environmental Regulation, all of which generate a positive impact on the preservation of the site.

However, the findings indicate that, although progress has been made in environmental management, it is necessary to strengthen environmental education and

awareness programs targeting both visitors and the local community. Promoting a culture of shared social responsibility in activities such as site cleanliness, protection of flora and fauna, and responsible use of the tourist space is essential to consolidate a truly sustainable tourism model at Cerro de la Memoria.

In this regard, it is concluded that the continuity and strengthening of the actions implemented by the Municipal Government of Ahome are key to ensuring environmental protection and destination sustainability. Continuous training, interinstitutional coordination, and adequate planning, communication, and promotion of the tourist attraction contribute to consolidating Cerro de la Memoria as a tourism reference of local and regional relevance, with potential for national and international projection.

Therefore, this study reaffirms that tourist destinations must adopt management models that ensure the conservation of natural and cultural resources while balancing tourism use with environmental preservation. Environmental education for visitors, together with responsible tourism practices, contributes not only to the protection of ecosystems and natural landscapes but also to the enhancement of the tourist experience and the well-being of the local community. In this way, Cerro de la Memoria is positioned as a representative case of how the integration of tourism, sustainability, and environmental conservation can foster the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

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